

Preparing for Thesis Committee Meetings

Step 1: Committee Setup & Requirements

- Ensure your committee meets JGPT requirements:
 - **Ph.D. Students:** 4 JGPT members (including PI) + 1 outside member (*add outside member in Year 4*).
 - **M.S. Students:** 3 JGPT members (including PI).
- **For Outside Members:** Send a copy of their CV to the Program Director / Liz for official files.
- Each year, evaluate if your current committee aligns with your project direction. (*Note: It is completely fine to change members as your project evolves*).

Step 2: Meeting Objectives & Agenda

Align your slide deck and talking points around these core goals:

- **Project Familiarization:** Introduce/update members on your thesis research area.
- **Relationship & Mentorship:** Build rapport with members for career guidance and future letters of recommendation.
- **Collective Troubleshooting & Feedback:** Prepare specific slides to discuss:
 - Planned experiments & methods employed
 - Recent data & key findings
 - Current roadblocks or technical difficulties
 - Progress on publications, posters, and presentations
 - Balance of research work vs. professional/career development
- **Degree Completion Consensus:** Work toward explicit agreement on required final experiments, writing expectations, and your target graduation timeline.

Step 3: Pre-Meeting Preparation

- **Literature Mastery:** Review all recent and foundational literature relevant to your project.
 - *Tip:* Prepare **back-up slides** summarizing key literature findings/data in case you need to reference them during Q&A.
- **Pre-Meeting Briefing:** Send an **Aims Page** to all committee members prior to the meeting to orient them in advance.
- **Note-Taking Plan:** Ask your PI/mentor to take notes during the meeting so you can focus entirely on presenting and engaging in discussion.

Step 4: Post-Meeting Follow-Up

- **Express Gratitude:** Send a thank-you email to all committee members.
- **Mentor Debrief:** Meet with your PI to review key feedback, priorities, and next steps.
- **1-on-1 Deep Dives:** Schedule individual follow-up meetings with any members who offered extensive feedback that couldn't be fully addressed during the main meeting.
- **Administrative Documentation:**
 1. Draft the official committee form available on the JGPT website.
 2. Send the draft form to your mentor for edits and review.
 3. Update the form based on mentor feedback.
 4. Request Liz to send the finalized form to committee members for electronic signatures via DocuSign.

Building Your Slide Deck – Max of 16 to 20 Slides

Topic	Slides	Details
Title	1	name, date, mentor, committee members
Big Picture	1-2	what year are you in graduate program, goals from the prior meeting and where you are in progress on them
Background	1-2	Only key background info to understand scientific premise
Project Aims	1	Overview of the 2 or 3 Aims for your thesis project (by year 4 for PhD)
Hypothesis (Hypotheses)	1	Make sure to clearly state what you anticipate observing
Research	5-6	Key Research findings: data, figures, chapters <u>since last meeting</u>
Output Metrics	1	Publications, conference presentations, grants applied/received, special trainings
Challenges/Roadblocks	2	Conceptual, technical or resources
Plans	2	Planned design for next experiments – including how you will ensure reproducible findings
Goals	1	Propose specific and measurable goals for the next 6 months

Approximate Time Breakdown of a Thesis Committee Meeting

~5 min – Student steps out for committee to recap where they are in their progress

~5 min – Student reviews their timeline (year in program, major accomplishments)

~15- 20 min – Student reviews key data findings, publication status, and if relevant, method development

This is not every piece of data – focus on data that have been repeated and are ready for publication; highlight if any data is preliminary

~10 min – Student reviews current roadblocks (conceptual, technical, or resources) and/or planned experiments in next 6 months

~20-25 min – Open discussion – obtain feedback from committee, and prioritize goals based on feedback

Discussion Time Should be at Least 20 Minutes of a 1 Hour Meeting